AMONG THE FAIRIES

THE MOUNTAIN IF.

By MARTHA M'CULLOCH WILLIAMS

"Remember, now, Miss Matilda," Nurse Elspeth said impressively, "if you do not behave prettily and show your dear godmamma how well you have been brought up you will get no fine doll upon your birthday nor any netted purse with a goldpiece inside."

Matilda tossed her head and shook herself so hard as to set her broad, blue sash aflaunt in nurse's face. It is no wonder she shook out two of the curls which nurse had coaxed laboriously into twining over her yellow head and about her rosy face.

"There! Now that has all to be done over, and the carriage may come for you at any minute!" nurse cried despairingly. "Oh, Miss Matilda, how could you, when you know godmamma hates unpunctuality next to mortal sins?"

"I shall hate her and you and everything about the day," Matilda said, twitching out of nurse's hands. "But I am not afraid," she went on. "It is just your way of frightening me. Ever since I was big enough to talk you have been telling me, 'If you do that,' 'If you do not do this.' If—I hate ifs. Besides, there is no need of them. I am very pretty. You know it, though you will not say it. Godmamma must give me things. There is no one else she can give them to."

"Oh, you misguided child! If you do not mend your ways"— nurse began, but stopped and gave all her strength to the curling iron. She had caught the roll of wheels and knew the carriage was at the gate. She knew, too, the coachman had orders never to wait longer than three minutes for Matilda to come down.

"Remember, you lose everything if"— she began afresh as she hustled her charge down stairs and out upon the steps. Matilda gave herself a flouncing shake which set curls and ribbons flying as she answered with a scowl:

"Do stop that! I tell you I cannot bear another word."

"Willful, willful! I don't know what will become of her," nurse said, sighing deeply as she watched the carriage bowl away. It was fine and trig, with sleek horses and spanking silver mounted harness. Mme. Jansen, Matilda's godmamma, had heaps of money and liked nothing so well as to spend it in making a show.

"She is big enough to know better. A girl rising 14 is very nearly a woman," Nurse Elspeth went on, "but she is motherless, poor dear, and has been humored and spoiled all her life! Mme. Jansen has done much of the spoiling, but that will not make her any more patient with it. If Matilda should set her off in a rage"—

"Well, and what if she should?" something said over her shoulder. Elspeth gave a cry. There was nothing alive in sight but a wicked, wise looking old raven, hopping along from sill to sill as though in search of crumbs. Something she did not in the least understand impelled her to answer as though a human being had spoken.

"It means ruin to my nurseling. She has been brought up in luxury, yet will

"OH, YOU MISGUIDED CHILD!"

have next to nothing from her father now that the new wife has borne him a son."

Maybe it was her fancy that she heard a hoarse chuckle. What is beyond dispute is that the raven flew away.

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Matilda sank back upon the soft carriage cushions with a thrill of delight. "If these were mine," she began, then checked herself angrily and said: "When these are mine, I shall drive out every day. I like godmamma's things ever so much better than what we have at home. She ought to be very happy to have me for her heiress, and I am sure I shall take care to be very happy in what I am to get."

"If you get it," something said through the window. Matilda started and sat very upright, craning her neck and trying to look high and scornful as she had sometimes seen her godmamma. But when she peered out of the big, clear window her haughtiness all vanished. They were going, not along the broad, smooth highway she knew so well, but over a rough, rutted road, that led up a high, stony mountain, so steep and wild looking she grew deadly afraid.

"You have lost the way. You had better give me the reins if you can do no better than this," she called loftily to the coachman. Finding that he did not answer nor heed her tugs upon the check string, she thrust her head out of the window and screamed to him: "Stop! Turn around! I will tell madam if you don't!"

"If—ha, ha! She talks of ifs here on the mountain If," she heard a hoarse voice cry, and, for all her fright, she noted that the coachman was in deep sleep and that a big, black raven sat grimacing and jeering at his elbow. When she tried to open the carriage door, the bird flew against it and seemed to hold it fast. "Come on, to the very top; you must!" she heard it say. Then it seemed to her she, too, fell into an enchanted sleep.

She could neither move nor cry out, though she saw and heard more plainly than ever. As the carriage climbed up and up every jar and jolt of it ran through her like a knife. By and by, when she had been carried to a great height, the motion stopped. Everything melted away. She was alone in a crystal prison, just outside and beneath which she saw the most entrancing things—now a magnificent garden, now a house finer than a castle, now fruits and flowers, now jewels, laces, pictures. But they did not rouse her to covetousness like the toys and games and the milk white pony, with shining, new caparison, that came in their wake. "Oh, oh, I must have them; I will! There is the doll I have always wanted. Her name shall be Lady Hildegard, and the pony is white as a May blossom. Of course I shall call it after the flowers. There is the frock I want, too, and the ring for my birthday. Madam must care a great deal for me to be at such trouble to please me all unawares."

"So you like what you see?" the hoarse voice demanded. Though Matilda could not see the raven, she was conscious of a black, fleeting shadow along the crystal. "Yes, I like it all more than I can say," she answered, quite forgetting her terrors in the eager joy of possession.

"Then why don't you take it all? Try it," the voice again cried. Matilda reached out her arms. Next minute she gave a scream. Her hands had struck against the hard, cold crystal. All she had ever wished for, all she cared for, was on the other side of it, and she could touch nothing. Defiantly she raised her foot and kicked with all her might against the wall. It stood unshivered, clear as the air itself, but proof against all her puny efforts.

"Where am I? Why will you not give me what I want?" she called breathlessly, and all about her she heard trills of elfin laughter.

"You are on the mountain If. We told you that at first," the voice cried, and this time Matilda fancied there were many fine notes under it. "The mountain If," it went on. "Know, little girl, that is the mountain which really stands between you mortals and destruction. You think otherwise. It seems to you to guard the portals of paradise. There is no way around nor over it, but the truly brave can pass straight through it."

"Tell me how," Matilda cried eagerly, her eyes on the milk white pony, which whinnied in friendly fashion and flicked its new saddle with its long silver tail as though inviting her to mount. The laughing had ceased. The voice, too, had lost some of its mockery when it went on, "You must pass the mountain If through the door of Endeavor."

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"Why, I believe the child has fallen asleep!" Mme. Jansen said when the coachman had opened the carriage door. Madame was smiling to herself as though in high good humor. She was a slight old lady, with keen eyes and a beak nose, who, some folk said, had dealings with black magic. But as she was so rich and grand they said it in a whisper. Besides she was never known to do harm to any one, although her proteges throve amazingly. She was dressed all in black, as shiny and glossy as any raven's new coat, and she dangled a beautiful gold ring, wrought in forget-menots, from her finger and led by a new checkrein exactly such a white pony as Matilda had seen upon the other side of the crystal wall.

"Come, wake up! My carriage must be well cushioned to let you sleep so soundly," madame repeated, pinching Matilda's cheek. Matilda was by this time very wide awake. She scrambled out in the most childish fashion, quite forgetting all the dignified young lady airs she had meant to assume, flung her arms first about godmamma's neck, then about the white pony's and said as she stroked its soft ears, "Was it truly a dream, godmamma, or are you, after all, a witch?"

"Believe whatever you like, my dear," madame said, with a sly smile. "Come in the house now. I want to find out if you are the same naughty girl you were this morning."

"Indeed I am not. But how did you know?" Matilda asked, clinging fast to madame's hand. And madame smiled, a soft, chuckling, contented smile, as she answered:

"Perhaps a bird told me. Anyway, it does not matter."

FARM FIELD AND GARDEN

GROWING MUSHROOMS.

Methods Practiced by Pennsylvania Producers of This Esculent.

Growing mushrooms is a simpler thing than many suppose. Mushrooms, in point of fact, can be raised in a variety of situations besides under the greenhouse benches. Any person with a cellar, stable, outhouse or pit where an even temperature of 55 to 65 degrees can be maintained can grow them. At least this is the statement of a Pennsylvania grower who submitted his methods to a state club not long ago. The Philadelphia Ledger reported on his address as follows:

The usual method is to make a hotbed a foot or more in depth of fresh manure from the horse stable and plant the mushroom spawn in this medium; then cover the bed with about two inches of good garden soil. In from five to six weeks the mushrooms will commence to appear, and the bed will keep on bearing for months. Care must be taken that the manure is fresh and that it is prepared by two or three turnings, at intervals of 48 hours, to bring it down to the proper temperature previous to making it into the bed. After the bed is formed to the proper depth it is beaten down firmly and left alone for a day or so. The temperature will commence to rise at first, but will not remain long above 100 degrees. As soon as it falls again to 90 degrees or below the bed should be spawned.

The mushroom spawn is sold in bricks or cakes, and these have to be broken into pieces the size of a walnut and inserted in the manure just under the surface at intervals of about nine inches, and then the bed is pressed down and smoothed over. The covering of soil is put on about eight or ten days after spawning. All the growers consider this interval important. If the bed were covered immediately, it would cause the manure to heat again to above 90 degrees and kill the spawn, but after the eighth or tenth day there is no danger.

A bed may be made of any size, large or small, as the mushrooms will grow equally well in either. The beds may be made on the floor and flat or ridged, against the wall, about three feet wide and of any desired length. The mushroom thrives best in an even, moist temperature of 57 degrees, and where this can be maintained there will be no difficulty in raising plenty of mushrooms. They can be grown from October to May indoors and outdoors in ridges protected by boards during April, May, June, September, October and November. An out of doors pit or cellar would be an excellent place to grow this crop, but it would require artificial heat during the winter months, except during mild weather. The pipes would go in the first thing, of course—say four inch hot water pipes around the pit. Make a flooring above the pipes about four inches clear and build the bed on this in the usual way. The best guidebooks on this subject are "Mushrooms; How to Grow Them," by William Falconer, and "Mushroom Culture," by William Robinson, the latter being an English work. The former was written for the climatic conditions of the United States.

Bedding For Horses.

It is a common practice for liverymen to use sawdust as bedding for horses where that is abundant and straw is hard to get. But if you raise grain we should advise you to save what is needed for bedding, no matter though the sawdust be offered free. Sawdust with manure makes it very hard to rot, much more so than is straw, though both, being carbon, have scarcely any manurial value. Market gardeners object to having sawdust in manure piles, though they always compost their manure before using. It is better to use either bedding as economically as possible, and without doubt long straw bedding can be used with less waste than can sawdust, partly because it is less absorptive. The excrement, either liquid or solid, passes through the straw without doing more than discolor it. So by shaking out and drying the straw can be used repeatedly until it has rotted and broken up. The liquid manure is best saved, not by absorbent bedding, but by a layer of three or four inches of wood loam underneath the horse or cow. This also is much better for horses' feet than standing on hard floors, either of wood or concrete. A little chopped straw lying on this earth will prevent the animal from being soiled with it. The earth flooring should be cleaned out once a week and replaced with new. With the excrement it has absorbed it will then be quite rich, but if the loam is scarce it may be dried and used repeatedly until it has absorbed all it is capable of holding.—American Cultivator.

Manuring For Wheat.

I know of no way in which greater effects can be gotten from a small amount of stable manure than in thin applications upon the surface of ground being prepared for wheat. When applied in this way, its mechanical effect is equal to its fertilizing power. Harrowing and dragging fine it and leave it as a mulch on the surface, and it helps to insure a stand of plants. Most soils have sufficient fertility to make a big yield of wheat if a good fall growth of plants can be gotten. Thin soils usually fail because they cannot force a strong growth before winter. A light coat of manure on the surface starts the wheat and lessens the danger of heaving by frost. The idea that stable manure should be plowed under for wheat is abandoned by most farmers. The common mistake now is to use too much of the small supply of manure on small fields near the barn for spring crops, when larger, though more remote, returns would be gotten by top dressing all thin land that is seeded to wheat and grass.—Cor. Farm and Fireside.